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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
TUESDAY, JANUARY 20, 2009

In Today's Papers

Erdogan Challenges the EU in the Heart of Europe (Tercuman)
Media outlets note Prime Minister Erdogan went to Brussels this weekend in order to face EU criticism that Turkey's accession reform process has stalled. During his visit, Erdogan assured the EU Turkey would continue its reforms, warned them that Turkey could withdraw its support from the Nabucco pipeline project if an energy chapter remains unopened in Turkey's EU bid, and rejected calls for Turkey to cut ties with Iran. Mainstream Miliyet carries the banner headline, "Nabucco Is Important to the EU." Mainstream Sabah reports in "Turkey's Energy Card to the EU," that Erdogan said, "Turkey will review its support of the Nabucco project if no accession chapters are opened regarding energy." Liberal Radikal calls the move, "A Nabucco Gamble In Response to the Cyprus Blockage" in Turkey's EU membership negotiations, noting Erdogan said, "Turkey will review its role in the Nabucco project if the Greek Cypriots continue to block accession negotiations on energy for political reasons." Mainstream Hurriyet reports, "Erdogan rejected criticism of Turkey's ties to Iran by saying, 'no one can meddle in Turkey's relations with Iran.'" Mainstream Aksam reports, "Erdogan Rejects the West's Calls to Cut Ties with Iran." Mainstream Hurriyet notes Erdogan "reported that an unnamed Israeli official said that Israel arrested top Hamas leaders in order to please Palestinian President Abbas," and Hurriyet calls these comments, "shocking." Hurriyet columnist Ferai Tinc says "Erdogan lobbied in support of Hamas" during his visit in Brussels and Tinc calls his use of the Nabucco project, "energy blackmail." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak carries the headline, "There's No Slowing Down in Turkey's Reforms." Islamist-oriented Zaman reports Erdogan gave "Guarantees to the EU that 2009 Will Be the Year of Reform."

Editorial Commentary on Erdogan's Remarks in Brussels

On Sunday, 1/19, Semih Idiz wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "Because of PM Erdogan's harsh criticism of Israel in Brussels this weekend, the PM has placed Turkey in the radical camp. Hamas is now thankful to PM Erdogan because of his direct and open support for Hamas. Erdogan's support for Hamas went above and beyond the support given

to Hamas from key countries in the region such as Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. At this point, Turkey can only work with Hamas because Erdogan's remarks have cost Ankara its capacity to mediate with anyone else."

On Sunday, January 19, Murat Yetkin wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal: "Erdogan's weekend visit to Brussels was important because this was the first time since 2004 Erdogan traveled to Brussels entirely for the EU agenda. This provides hope that Turkey-EU ties may thaw after their 2004 de facto freeze."

Turkey Alkan wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal: "The prime minister of this country is saying that two-thirds of Israeli soil belongs to Palestinians. PM Erdogan's rhetoric has clearly created a diplomatic scandal."

Davutoglu: "Turkey Convinced Hamas to Declare a Ceasefire" Mainstreams Sabah and Milliyet, and Islamist-oriented Zaman report the prime minister's chief foreign policy strategist, Ahmet Davutoglu, told reporters, "Thanks to Turkey, Hamas agreed to a ceasefire," and Davutoglu coined Turkey "the conscience of the region," due to its efforts to work with Hamas. "We went back and forth between Egypt and Syria for seven days," said Davutoglu. "Turkey is not trying to steal Egypt's role in the process; without Egypt, there can be no solution in Gaza."

Retired Gendarme Intelligence Officer Found Dead
Media outlets report retired Colonel Abdulkerim Kirca, the former commander of gendarme intelligence service JITEM in Diyarbakir, committed suicide in Ankara yesterday. Kirca was facing trial for

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13 murders in southeast Turkey. According to papers, Kirca's suicide came after press reports linked him to the murders and reports that he may have carried out the murders as a member of the shadowy 'Ergenekon' deep state gang. Conservative-nationalist Star reported Monday a PKK informant testified that he witnessed Kirca killing at least three people. Leftist Taraf says Kirca was a "nightmare" for the Kurds when he was posted to the Diyarbakir. Papers note that in 2004, Kirca was awarded a state medal by former President Sezer. In his suicide letter, Kirca complained that the same state which awarded him a medal of honor is now accusing him of murder based on "lies from PKK informants."

Israel's Withdrawal is a Good Will Gesture to Obama (Cumhuriyet)
Media outlets conclude the timing of Israel's withdrawal from Gaza is no coincidence. Leftist Taraf headlines, "Olmert Withdraws for Obama." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports, "Israel puts on the brakes to the massacre prior to Obama's inauguration ceremony." Mainstream Milliyet says, "Obama's Shadow is Sufficient," to prompt Israel to withdraw from Gaza prior to his inauguration. Milliyet columnist Sami Kohen opines, "Israeli attacks have ceased prior to Obama's inauguration," but "Obama's silence on the Israeli attacks in Gaza appear to be an expression of his support of Israel." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak's headline screams, "They Burned, They Destroyed, and They Are Withdrawing," as Israeli "Jets Withdraw for Obama." Hurriyet columnist Cuneyt Ulsever comments, "Obama will never embrace Hamas," and Obama's team "must have noticed Erdogan's stated support for Hamas and Iran and his statements fueling anti-Semitism."

The Dream Comes True Today (Sabah)
Islamist-oriented Zaman reports in a front-page banner headline, "The U.S. Begins a New Era with Obama." Mainstream Vatan reports, "The World Will Not Miss Bush." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports, "Bush Left the World in Ruins," as "The U.S. Enjoys a Climate of Celebration," prior to Obama's inauguration today. Columnist Cuneyt Ulsever of mainstream Hurriyet comments, "Obama is expected to open a new chapter for the U.S. and the world."

A photo from leftist Taraf shows Afro-Turks in the Western province of Mugla, Turkey. Their sign says, "Afro-Turks Love You Very Much," and the organizer of the group invited Obama to meet the Afro-Turk community in Mugla.

Editorial Commentary on Israel/Gaza-Washington

Fehmi Kuru wrote in Islamist leaning Yeni Safak: "Given the timing of the Gaza attacks and the timing of ceasefire, Israel sent a clear message to the Obama administration that Washington must consider the Israel factor in every step the U.S. plans to take regarding the Middle East."

Thousands Commemorate Hrant Dink

All papers report that slain Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink was commemorated Monday on the second anniversary of his death. Thousands gathered outside the Istanbul office of his Agos newspaper, the very spot he was shot dead. Those who attended the ceremony chanted slogans saying "we are all Hrant, we are all Armenians." Some carried banners which read "for Hrant, for justice."

Costly Tender for Turkey's Nuclear Plant

Hurriyet, Vatan, Milliyet, Sabah: Turkish businessman Turgay Ciner and his Russian partner were the sole bidders in a tender to build Turkey's first nuclear power plant. However, the consortium offered a costly price for electricity that will be sold to the state from the nuclear power plant, which will be established in Akkuyu in southern province of Mersin. Mainstream Sabah quotes Energy Minister Guler as saying "we returned the revised tender envelope because there is an alternative envelope to replace this one."

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TV News:
CNN Turk

Domestic News

- Opposition CHP develops a special computer program which would detect the irregularities in the registry of voters before the forthcoming municipality elections in March.
- Economy Coordination Board is to set up a special working group to work on measures for supporting different sectors in Turkey which were stricken badly in the economic crisis.
- State Minister Kursad Tuzmen will travel to Iran from January 26-29.

International News

- Former Iranian president Muhammad Khatami will reportedly run in Iran's presidential election in June, and challenge President Ahmadinejad.
- Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni deadly raids would be resumed should Israel come under rocket attacks by Hamas fighters.
- Taliban militants bomb five schools in Pakistan as part of their campaign against girls' education.

JEFFREY